MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

At the same time as HealthChoice was being instituted, a change involving the provision of mental health services was undertaken. The DHMH's Mental Hygiene Administration (MHA) assumed oversight authority for the provision of public mental health care services under a newly organized structure. In the past, public mental health services in Maryland were organized around two separate funding sources through the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH): Medicaid (Medical Assistance) and Mental Hygiene Administration (MHA) grant funding. These two funding sources for public mental health services were merged so that they could be managed according to a common set of guidelines and principles.

Most mental health care is provided by the specialty mental health system operated by the MHA. However, primary mental health services including substance abuse services are provided by MCOs. Primary mental health services are defined as: the clinical evaluation and assessment of services needed by an individual and the provision of services that can be provided by a primary care provider as well as through the referral for additional specialty mental services deemed medically appropriate by a primary care provider.

In conjunction with the Core Service Agencies (CSA's), the MHA designed the public mental health system, and has oversight authority. The CSAs are responsible for planning, managing and monitoring public mental health services at the local level. CSAs exist under the authority of the Secretary of DHMH and also are agents of the county governments which approve their organizational structure.

Maryland Health Partners (MHP) is the organization contracted by MHA to assist the CSAs in managing the public mental health system. Maryland Health Partners coordinates benefits, pre-authorizes services, and provides other administrative services. This arrangement assures access to mental health services for persons with a range of mental health needs, including persons with serious mental illness.